

Shaped for Serving God
40 Days of Purpose
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I played basketball in high school. I didn't play well, but I played. I couldn't jump over a phone book, but what I lacked in jumping skills, I more than made up for with my turtle-like slowness. The only thing I had going for me was that I was tall. So when the coach would send me into the game, he would say, "Kory, go stand under the basket." I'd say, "What do you want me to do?" and he'd reply, "Um...go eat up some space."

I was a space-eater. It was my job to simply take up space near the basket so that opposing players couldn't just waltz in and score two points. Occasionally I would make a basket or get a rebound, but I was mostly known as a space-eater.

That might not be a bad reputation to have as a basketball player, but it's not a good thing for a Christian. We were not put here on earth to eat space. We were put here for a purpose, and we've spent the last few weeks exploring what our purpose is, with the help of Rick Warren's book "The Purpose Driven Life."

So far, we have learned that we were created to be loved by God and to love God back. We've also learned that we were formed to be a part of God's family, and that we were created to become like Christ. That's worship, fellowship, and discipleship. Today we look out our fourth purpose: we were shaped for serving God.

In other words, we need to get into shape for serving God. This doesn't mean physical shape. We don't have to do what one lady did when she wanted to get into shape. She said, "I decided to take an aerobics class. I bent, twisted, gyrated, jumped up and down, and sweated for an hour. But, by the time I got my leotards on, the class was over." We don't have to go through that to serve God.

What we do have to do is to realize why we were put here. God didn't send Jesus Christ to die on the cross for us so that we could take up space. We were saved for service. We were saved to be servants.

Warren makes the point that, in the Bible, the words "servant" and "minister" are synonymous. Now, if someone were to ask you who the minister of Community Christian Church is, you'd probably say me. And in a sense, you're right. I'm one of the ministers here. But if we go by the biblical definition, a minister is one who does ministry, which is serving God. Anyone who serves God is a minister. So the ministers of Community Christian Church are everyone who serves.

At home church in Jeffersonville, they do a neat thing in their bulletin each week. At the place where they list the staff, it says: Pastor – Bruce Barkhauer. Minister – all our members. Every one of you who serves in some capacity at Community Christian Church is a ministry. What you do is ministry. Turn someone and say, "You're a minister!"

Serving God is a natural outpouring of our faith. It's our automatic response of gratitude for all that we have been given. And we have been given much. Each of us has been specially equipped to serve, and nothing we have is extraneous to that purpose. We have been given abilities, interests, talents, gifts, and personality to be used to bring glory to God through our service. Even some of our most difficult experiences can be used to help others. God doesn't anything about us.

Yet, when we're put on the spot, we can all think of reasons why we don't serve. Some of these are legitimate reasons. Sometimes we are asked to serve in an area in which we aren't gifted. Sometimes the circumstances of life keep us from being able to serve. Those are understandable reasons.

But we have other reasons for not using our gifts. One of those reasons is feelings of inadequacy. We feel like we're not good enough to serve or we don't know enough to serve, so we don't serve. Those feelings were strong in me when I was contemplating seminary. "I'm not good enough." I assumed the other students would be wearing white robes and halos, floating a couple inches off the ground. I just knew everyone else was more spiritual than me, more faithful than me, knew the Bible better than me. None of that was true, but I still asked, "Why me?" I've heard elders and committee chairs express the same sentiment. Who am I to be in this position? Why is God using me?

You know, that's a legitimate question. God is God and believe me he could have found much more efficient and effective ways of carrying out his plan for the world than choosing to use us. The simple fact is that, when it comes to doing God's work, we're all inadequate. It's almost funny to me that I have been called to be God's representative. Like anyone can do that!

And yet, I have found that God has used me in ways I never could have imagined. We are not perfect. But we are God's child, created by God to serve. Our service doesn't have to be perfect for God to bless it. If God only used perfect people, nothing would ever get done at this church. We're all a bunch of misfits. We all have weaknesses. We all have faults. We all have failures. But guess what? God uses us all. God doesn't use perfect people; God only uses faithful people. I would rather involved hundreds of people at this church in an imperfect ministry than have a perfect church run by a few elites.

Another barrier to serving God is our availability. I know this is a touchy one because our lives are so busy, and I respect that. But I also have to ask what's been crowded out. As I recall, nowhere in the gospel did Jesus plan a miracle. He never woke up and said to his disciples, "OK boys, I have a leper coming at 10 a.m., then I have to run James over to Bethesda for a basketball game at noon, then after lunch see a man about his dead daughter." Jesus never planned his ministry. His ministry happened when he let himself be open to the opportunities around him. I'm not saying you should drop all your responsibilities to serve the Lord. I'm simply saying that a servant stays open to the ways God calls them to serve, a servant never crowds their schedule so much that there's no room left for serving God.

This includes staying open to the needs around us. Warren says that our primary area of service should be in the area of our gifts, but our secondary area of service should be wherever we're needed at the moment. It's doesn't take a special gift to put away chairs or help hide Easter Eggs or provide treats for Sunday morning after church. It only takes a willingness to serve.

Not all the ways we serve are going to be glamorous. Not every ministry we participate in will be recognized and applauded. But there's a between prominence and significance. My nose is prominent, but I can live without it. And although my heart isn't prominent, I'd say it's pretty significant. Some ministries are more visible than others, but no ministry is more significant than another one. Working in the toddler nursery is a ministry. Collecting the funds and writing the checks is a ministry. Preparing a meal for a church function is a ministry. There's no such thing as an insignificant ministry.

There once was a boy who went to hear a famous speaker. The boy took a lunch with him in case he got hungry. While at this function, the speaker's assistants realized that no one was in charge of getting refreshments for this large audience. So the assistant asked the boy if he could borrow his lunch. The assistant took the lunch – just a couple of fish and a few loaves of bread – to the speaker, who miraculously multiplied that simple meal into a feast big enough to feed every person present, with doggie baskets left over.

Do you know that boy's name? Me either. But not only did his simple act feed 5,000 people, his story has been instrumental in bring millions of people to faith. There's no such thing as an insignificant ministry.

In a perfect church, we'd all be praised for everything we do for the church. Perry, that's the best job of putting away a chair I've ever seen! Fred, those communion cups are filled to just the right level! But in reality, much of the work we do goes unnoticed...by others. But, ultimately, we're not serving to please others. We're serving to please God, and God notices all of our service, from the most menial task to the grandest ministry.

Why are you here at CCC in Lincolnshire, Ill.? I'll tell you why. You're here because God knew you had something to give. God brought you here, where you could use your gifts to serve God through this church. God wants to use you.

We don't light a candle to make the candle more comfortable; we light it so that it will do what it was created to do, so that it will give light. God didn't give us the light of Jesus Christ so that we could spend the rest of our days eating space; we've been given that light so that we can let it shine. We are not here for ourselves; we are here to serve.